



## Using Program Evaluation to Improve Programs: Recommended Strategies

Program evaluation is an essential organizational practice in public health and education to guide ongoing and future program activities. Evaluation activities are important in helping agencies to a) collect data about their activities to guide program development and improvement b) perform effectively as a service agency c) make their efforts outcome oriented and d) assess achievement of program goals. Agencies need to develop clear plans, inclusive partnerships, and feedback systems that allow learning and ongoing improvement. Conducting routine, practical evaluations that provide information for management and improve program effectiveness should be a part of state and local education and public health programs.<sup>1</sup>

CDC suggests the following steps to conduct program evaluations:

- Engage stakeholders
- Describe the program (e.g., logic modeling)
- Focus the evaluation design
- Gather credible evidence
- Justify conclusions
- Ensure use and share lessons learned

Evaluation activities should address both process evaluation and program outcomes. Specifically, CDC suggests that funded partners

### 1) Establish a process evaluation system for your program

Maintaining accurate and organized records on programmatic activities will help program staff effectively monitor and report on their disease prevention and health promotion efforts. Knowing the who, what, when, and where of program activities allows staff to assess how well the program has met its goals and objectives. It also allows staff to chart and report on activities across time in a systematic and cost-effective manner. CDC suggests that funded partners

- Designate a person responsible for ensuring that all program activities (e.g., trainings, outreach efforts, health promotion activities, presentations) are recorded in a systematic and coordinated fashion.
- Use database management software to enter and maintain information related to all major programmatic activities.

### 2) Evaluate the outcome of one major aspect of your program annually.

Program evaluation should focus on at least one major programmatic aspect described in the annual cooperative agreement. CDC suggests that funded partners

- Designate a person responsible for oversight and planning of annual program evaluations.
- Design and implement program outcome evaluations linked to annual program goals and objectives.

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Results from program evaluation activities should be used to inform and improve program performance. CDC suggests that programs use the above evaluation activities to

- Inform program staff and key stakeholders about the program.
- Identify strengths and areas that need improvement.
- Develop reports to inform stakeholders at the local, state, and federal level.

CDC also encourages funded partners to seek evaluation technical assistance from the DASH-funded evaluation contractor, the Academy for Education Development (AED), to help build skills related to program evaluation.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health. MMWR 1999;48(No. RR-11). <http://www.cdc.gov/eval/framework.htm>